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ABSTRACT

This paper examined the perceived values of children and fertility intents among college undergraduates. It described changes in the value of children by comparing data collected from students in 1986 to data obtained from a comparable group of students in 1977. The 1977 sample consisted of 341 students of whom 178 (52%) were male and 193 (48%) were females. The 1986 sample consisted of 332 students of whom 137 (41%) were male and 195 (59%) were females. Specific values of children were assessed using the Children Attitude Scales. The findings indicated that students in 1986 agreed more than students in 1977 with children providing continuity, tradition, security, and goals and incentives and agreed less with the costs of children, the need for decision-mindedness in childbearing, and children providing social status. More changes occurred for males than females between 1977 and 1986, and a strong relationship existed between the specific values of children and number of children expected in both survey years. A pattern from both studies indicated that people who desired larger families were more likely to emphasize the positive values of children while minimizing the costs and need for decision-mindedness. An appendix provides the conceptual model, and 13 references are included. (JHP)

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CHANGES IN VALUES OF CHILDREN AND FERTILITY INTENTS FROM 1977-1986

A Paper Presented at the
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Division 34 - Population and Environmental Psychology

by

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Why have children? As gender, work and family roles have changed, this question has become more discussed. Having a child has become an option rather than a mandate. Contraceptive technology, delayed marriage and childbearing, increased career expectations of women, changes in gender roles and in the family have all contributed to an increased focus on the motivations for becoming a parent. What are the perceived advantages and disadvantages of having a child; i.e., what are the values of children? Are there differences by gender in the values of children? Is there a relationship between the values of children and the expected number of children? Have there been changes in the value of children in the past decade? These are the focus of this study.

The current study is concerned with the perceived values of children and fertility intents among college students. It measures changes in the values of children in this population by comparing the values of children in college students in 1985 with the values of children of a comparable group of college students tested nine years earlier, 1977 (Morahan, 1978; Morahan-Martin, 1982; Morahan-Martin, 1983). Analyses were done separately by gender. Further, the study assesses the relationships found between the perceived values of children and family size expectations found in the earlier study continue to exist with the current college students.

This study utilized and modified the model, based on Hoffman and Hoffman (1973), used in the cross-national Value of Children Study (Arnold, Bulatao, Buripakdi, Chung, Fawcett, Iriani, Lee, & Wu, 1975; Arnold & Fawcett, 1975). (See Appendix.) In this model, the background factors of gender, age, socio-economic status and religion are viewed as related to both fertility values and expectations. The specific values of children are viewed as intervening variables between the background factors and family size expectations. This model is concerned with childbearing expectations and values from an individual level. It is assumed that social trends would affect both the specific values

of children and childbearing expectations.

The value of children encompasses both the positive functions and satisfactions of having children and the discomforts and costs of having children. In the present study, nine specific values of children are assessed using the Value of Children Attitude Scales (Arnold et al., 1975; Arnold & Fawcett, 1975). These include six positive and three negative values. The six positive values deal with benefits from having children. They include: 1.) children for continuity, tradition and security; 2.) parenthood satisfactions and sense of achievement from children; 3.) role motivations of parenthood; 4.) happiness and affection from children; 5.) goals and incentives from having children; and 6.) social status from children. The last three values deal with dimensions other than satisfactions. These include 7.) external controls pressuring one to become a parent; 8.) the costs of children; and 9.) decision mindedness in childbearing.

METHOD

Subjects

Both samples consisted of undergraduate students enrolled in psychology courses at Bryant College in Rhode Island. The 1977 sample consisted of 341 students of whom 178 (52%) were male and 193 (48%) were females. The 1986 sample consisted of 332 students of whom 137 (41%) were male and 195 (59%) were females. The students ranged in age from 18-24.

Procedure

The main goal of this study was to assess if there are changes from 1977 to 1986 in college student's perceived values of children by gender and in the relationship of values of children to fertility expectations. The dependent variable of expected number of children was assessed by a direct question. The nine specific values of children were assessed on the Likert-type Value of Children Attitude Scales (Arnold et al., 1975; Arnold & Fawcett, 1975). The

independent variable was gender. Religion and socioeconomic status, as determined by parental occupation (Bogue, 1969) were used as control variables in correlational analyses and analyses of covariance. Reliability was assessed using coefficient alpha. The reliability on all but one of the values of children scales was good ($r \geq .53$). The extremely low reliability ($r = .07$) of the scale, external controls on childbearing, necessitates minimizing any significance found on this scale.

Treatment of the data and results

It was anticipated that there had been no significant change between 1977 and 1986 in how children are valued by college students. By 1977, the women's movement, population concerns, contraceptive technology, delayed marriage and childbearing as well as changes in the family structure were all well established. It was assumed that these social forces would have been reflected in the 1977 sample and should not change in the 1986 sample. Further, the values of children are seen to be related to age-appropriate developmental needs as well as parental status.

Therefore, it was hypothesized that there would be no difference in the values of children between 1977 and 1986 in the total sample as well as in each gender. To test these hypotheses, analyses of covariance were conducted for the total sample and for each gender by survey year with socioeconomic status and religion held constant.

Contrary to predictions, there were shifts between 1977 and 1986 in the values of children. For the total sample there were significant changes in the two survey years on five of the nine values of children ($p \leq .05$). Two values, continuity, tradition, and security ($F = 5.98$) and goals and incentives from children ($F = 7.20$) were rated higher by the 1986 sample than the 1977 sample while the 1986 sample rated three other values lower: social status from children ($F = 3.63$), costs of children ($F = 3.76$), and decision-mindedness in childbearing ($F = 5.57$).

Males showed greater changes between 1977 and 1986 than females on the specific values of children. For males, there were significant changes between survey years on five of the nine values of children ($p < .05$). Males in 1986 agreed more than males in 1977 that children provide goals and incentives ($F = 3.94$). However, males in 1986 rated the following values lower than males in 1977: social status from children ($F = 2.52$), costs of children ($F = 7.87$), decision-mindedness in childbearing ($F = 7.67$), and parenthood satisfactions ($F = 3.18$). For females, there were changes on two values. Females agreed more in 1986 than 1977 that children provide continuity, tradition, and security ($F = 5.63$) and goals and incentives ($F = 4.61$).

Overall, contrary to expectations, there were changes in the value of children between 1977 and 1986. The changes indicate a shift towards more traditional values in 1986 than 1977. There was more agreement in 1986 with the traditional values of children providing continuity, tradition, and security and goals and incentives while the 1986 sample agreed less with the costs of childbearing and the need for decision-mindedness in childbearing as well as children providing social status. There were more changes in the values of children between survey years for males than females. Females changes on only two specific values of children across survey years while males changed on five values of children between 1977 and 1986. Both males and females agreed more in 1986 than 1977 that children provide goals and incentives. Females in 1986 also agreed more than in 1977 that children provide continuity, tradition, and security. There were no differences for the two groups of males on this scale. Males agreed less in 1986 than 1977 with children providing social status, satisfaction from childbearing, costs of children and decision-mindedness in childbearing. There were no significant differences on these values for women in the two survey years.

It had been hypothesized that the perceived values of children among

college students reflected their current developmental needs and their childlessness, and that therefore there would be no changes in the values of children between 1977 and 1986. This prediction was not supported. The changes found between the survey years of 1977 and 1986 may reflect historical social changes. Students overall have become politically more conservative. It is possible that the shifts found in this study reflect more conservative values in children as well. The changes are more significant for male students. The gender differences in the values of children which are reported in the next section for the 1986 sample do indicate that the male students overall favor more conservative values of children than the female students.

There were significant gender differences in how children were valued in the 1977 sample ($p < .05$). Men favored children to continue family name and tradition more than women. This had been predicted in a patriarchal society and is consistent with other studies (Arnold & Fawcett, 1975; Hoffman, Thornton & Manis, 1978; Rabin, 1965; Weller, 1970). Men also agreed more than women on the following values: role motivations, social status, and costs of children.

It was hypothesized that men continue to agree more than women on the same values of children in the 1986 study. To test these hypotheses, analyses of covariance were conducted with socioeconomic status and religion held constant. There were significant gender differences in four values of children in the 1986 study. Consistent with the 1977 study and as predicted, males agreed more than females on the following values of children ($p < .05$): children for continuity, tradition and security ($F = 3.44$); role motivations from children ($F = 7.01$); and social status from children ($F = 2.64$). Males in the 1986 study also agreed more than females that children provide goals and incentives ($F = 4.54$, $p < .01$). In 1977, gender differences on this

value had been in the same direction, but not significant. Contrary to predictions based on the 1977 study, there were no significant gender differences with 1986 college students on the costs of children.

Thus, in both 1977 and 1986, males agree more than females that children are a source of continuity, tradition, and security and also provide role motivations and social status. Males greater emphasis on children providing continuity, tradition, and security is consistent with male socialization in a patriarchal society (Arnold & Fawcett, 1975; Hoffman & Manis, 1978; Rabin, 1965; Weller, 1970). The greater agreement by males that children provide an adult role and social status is more difficult to interpret. Traditional female socialization would predict that women anticipate and receive roles and status from becoming mothers (Hoffman & Hoffman, 1973). However, the college females in these studies were less likely to agree with these values. The increasing career orientation of young women may account for this shift from more traditional female patterns on these values. There were some changes in gender differences from 1977 to 1986. Males in the 1986 study agreed more than females that children provide goals and incentives. However, there were no significant gender differences in 1986 on the costs of children. Both of these are the reverse of the 1977 study.

In the 1977 sample, the number of children expected was related to how children were valued on seven of the nine specific values of children ($p < .05$). Direct relationships were found with most of the positive values: children for continuity, tradition, and security; role motivations; goals and incentives from children; and external controls on childbearing. Inverse relationships were found with the values of social status from children, costs of children, and decision-mindedness in childbearing.

It was hypothesized that the same relationships between values of children and fertility intents will be found in the 1986 sample. To test this

hypothesis, partial correlations were conducted on the latter group, with socioeconomic status and religion held constant. The partial correlations reported here are all from the 1986 study. Five of the seven predicted relationships between values of children and number of children expected were confirmed in the 1986 sample ($p < .05$). Specifically, in 1986 as in 1977, the number of children expected was directly related to three positive values of children: children for continuity, tradition, and security ($r = .274$); role motivations from children ($r = .220$); and goals and incentives from children ($r = .268$). (Reported relationships are all from the 1986 study.) As predicted, there was an inverse relationship in both years between the number of children expected and costs of children ($r = -.212$) and decision-mindedness in childbearing ($r = -.125$). Additionally, two unpredicted relationships were significant in the 1986 sample; the expected number of children was positively related to parenthood satisfactions ($r = .240$) and happiness and affection from children ($r = .131$). These had not been significant in 1977. Two relationships which had been significant in the earlier study and were predicted to be significant in the 1986 study were not significant: external controls on childbearing and social status from children.

In summary, there was a strong relationship between the specific values of children, and the expected number of children in 1977 and 1986. In both years, significance was found in seven of the nine scales. The two remaining scales not significant in 1977 were significant in 1986 and vice versa. The pattern emerging from both studies was that people who wanted larger families were more likely to emphasize the positive values of children while minimizing the costs of childbearing and the need for decision-mindedness in childbearing.

Conclusions

The current study was part of an ongoing project in which the author planned a longitudinal study of the current, 1986, and previous, 1977, samples of college students to assess changes in the childbearing values and intents as affected by age and parenthood (Morahan, 1978; Morahan-Martin, 1982; Morahan-Martin, 1983). College students who were not in their childbearing years were chosen to assess the perceived values of children and childbearing before the young men and women had become parents. It was hypothesized that the perceived values of children among college students reflected both their age, appropriate developmental needs, and their childlessness. Therefore, it had been predicted that there would be no changes in the values of children among college students between 1977 and 1986. Analyses of covariance were conducted to compare the students in the two survey years with SES and religion held constant.

The predictions of no change was not supported for five of the nine specific values of children. Students in 1986 agreed more with children providing continuity, tradition, and security as well as goals and incentives and less with the costs of children, the need for decision-mindedness in childbearing, and children providing social status. These changes may indicate a shift towards more conservative values in 1986 than in 1977. There were more changes in the specific values of children for males than females between 1977 and 1986. Males changes on five values of children while females changed on two values of children.

The second part of the study was to test whether gender differences found in the 1977 study were also found in the 1986 study. Analyses of covariance were conducted in the 1986 study to test for gender differences with SES and religion held constant. Consistent with the 1977 study and as predicted, males agreed more than females in 1986 on three values of child-

ren: continuity, tradition, and security; role motivations from children; and social status from children. Contrary to the predictions based on the 1977 study, there were no significant differences in the 1986 study on the costs of children. However, there were unpredicted significant gender differences in the 1986 sample on children providing goals and incentives which was favored more by males than females. Thus, although there were differences between the two survey years in the specific values of children, the pattern of gender differences remains similar in 1986 as it was in 1977. In both survey years, men tended to favor the more traditional values of children.

The third part of the study was to assess whether the number of children expected was related to the specific values of children. It was predicted that significant relationships would be found for the 1986 study in the same seven values of children as in the 1977 study. Partial correlations were conducted with socioeconomic status and religion held constant. Five of the seven predicted relationships between values of children and expected number of children were confirmed. Of the remaining four values of children, two were significantly related to childbearing expectations in 1977 but not in 1986 and two in 1986 but not in 1977. Thus, there was a strong relationship between the specific values of children and the number of children expected in both survey years. Significant correlationships were found in 1977 and 1986 in seven of the nine values of children. In both studies, people who wanted larger families were more likely to emphasize the positive values of children while minimizing the costs of children and the need for decision-mindedness in childbearing.

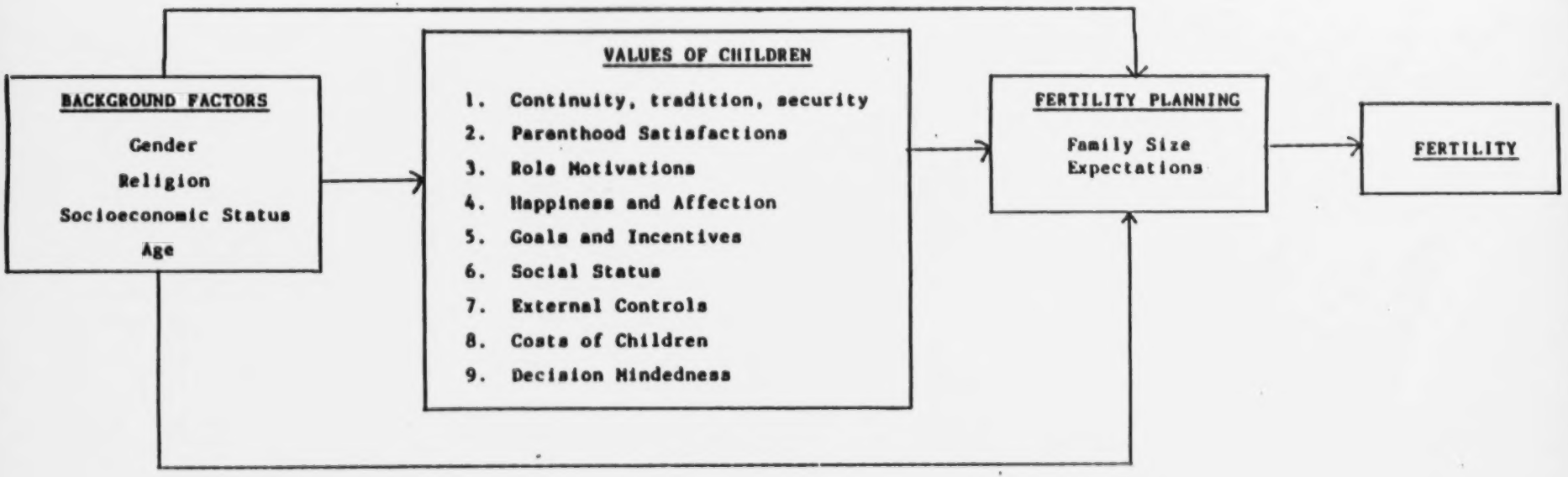
Currently, a survey of the respondents in the 1977 study is being conducted. Prior to the analyses of college students as reported in this paper, it had been hypothesized that the students in the 1977 college sample who are now in their late twenties and early thirties, would have changed in how

they perceive the values of children both as a function of their developmental needs and of their current status as parents or not (Hoffman et al., 1978). Results of the current study seem to indicate some historical social shift in the values of children which may be a cohort change or may be evident among both the young adults and college students in 1986.

Further research using more diverse samples is needed in this area.

APPENDIX

Conceptual Model of the Current Study



Adapted from the Value of Children Study
(Arnold et al., 1975, p. 8)

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